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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HANOI 000494

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP/MLS AND DRL/AWH

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [CH](#) [VM](#)

SUBJECT: PRO-DEMOCRACY YOUTH GROUP PLANS ANTI-CHINA
PROTESTS WHEN OLYMPIC TORCH ARRIVES IN VIETNAM

REF: A. HCMC 0443
[B.](#) HCMC 0446
[C.](#) HANOI 0184
[D.](#) HCMC 0235

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Classified By: Political Counselor Brian C. Aggeler for Reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

SUMMARY

[11.](#) (C) On April 28, Poloff met with a pro-democracy youth group leader in Hanoi to discuss the group's plans for anti-China protests during the Olympics torch run in HCMC on April 29. Ms. Nguyen Trang Nhong of Viet Youth for Democracy (VYD) said April 29 protests were planned for both HCMC and Hanoi, but said a strong police presence would make things difficult for protesters. Ms. Nhong claimed that VYD's membership was growing significantly as more Vietnamese youth were becoming politically active and taking advantage of blogging and Internet access to non-censored information. She claimed that Vietnamese youth were increasingly dissatisfied with the GVN's lack of response to Chinese hegemony in the South China Sea and the suppression of a free press in Vietnam. VYD is affiliated with the better known underground opposition party, the Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV), which has splintered into two factions since the death of its leader Hoang Minh Chinh in February (Ref. C). End Summary.

VIET YOUTH FOR DEMOCRACY

[12.](#) (C) On April 28, Poloff met with Ms. Nguyen Trang Nhong, Hanoi representative of Viet Youth for Democracy (VYD), a relatively new underground pro-democracy youth group formed initially by overseas Vietnamese students. Hanoi "spokesperson" Nguyen Trang Nhong briefed Poloff on plans for anti-China protests, on the occasion of the April 29 Olympic torch run in HCMC, and the group's current activities. Nhong returned to Hanoi last year after several years studying and working in Japan. Generally speaking, VYD's approach to political change is "change from the inside," meaning most members seek political reform from within the current system and do not necessarily advocate regime change.

ANTI-CHINA PROTESTS PLANNED FOR TORCH RELAY

¶ 3. (C) Nhung said that VYD would be involved in protests in both Hanoi and HCMC on April 29, during the Olympic torch relay ceremony in HCMC. She said her group expected the police presence to be strong, citing two to three thousand police officers in HCMC. According to Nhun, in Hanoi a group of 50 to 100 individuals would rally at 9 AM on Hoang Dieu Street, near the Chinese Embassy, while in HCMC 500 individuals would rally at 11 AM near the Opera House.

¶ 4. (C) Nhun said young people in Vietnam were becoming more politically active. Her reasons, in order of significance, were:

-- Chinese hegemony over the Paracel and Spratly islands and deep discontent with the GVN's response: Nhun claimed a GVN cover-up of the issues and suppression of the media, noting how the GVN had suppressed the truth about the killing of Vietnamese fishermen "on more than one occasion" in incidents in the Paracel islands.

-- General Chinese suppression of Vietnam: Nhun said that the Government of China (GOC) was against Vietnam's recent launch of its first commercial satellite, Vinasat, because the GOC believed the GVN would use it for surveillance of Chinese territory, including the South China Sea.

-- A reaction to arrests, detentions and harassment of other youth leaders and dissidents.

-- Price inflation: Soaring prices of consumer staple products such as rice and gasoline are badly affecting the poor in Vietnam, Nhun said.

-- Blogs: Young people in Vietnam are getting more accurate

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information from overseas via blogs.

VIET YOUTH FOR DEMOCRACY ALLEGEDLY GROWING

¶ 5. (C) Viet Youth for Democracy's leader is HCMC-based Nguyen Tien Trung, who was conscripted into the Vietnamese military. That Trung was conscripted against his will was unusual; he went to boot camp in March, and Nhun said he is okay and his parents are able to visit him once a week. Nhun told Poloff that VYD's membership is growing. At the beginning of the year, the group claimed 120 members, but by April that had increased to 170. Individuals may join VYD online, and members typically range in age from 18 to 40, although there is no age limit. According to Nhun, some members of the group operate online using aliases and making use of blogs. Nguyen Tien Trung's activism has been curtailed since he started his 18 months of mandatory military service. Nhun said that other pro-democracy groups, besides VYD, were cropping up in Vietnam and taking advantage of the Internet and blog communities (Ref. D). These include "Youth for Freedom" (founded in 2007) and "Lac Viet Youth" (founded in 2008). She says like VYD, these groups have growing memberships in both Hanoi and HCMC.

¶ 6. (C) VYD is affiliated with the better known underground opposition party the Democratic Party of Vietnam (DPV) as well as the smaller Freelance Journalists Club (Ref. A). However, since the February death of the DPV's leader, Secretary-General Hoang Minh Chinh (Ref. C), the DPV has "unfortunately" splintered into two factions, Nhun said. The larger faction, still named the Democratic Party of Vietnam is now being led by United States-based Nguyen Tam, who was appointed as successor by Hoang Minh Chinh himself before his death. Nhun said that this was not public knowledge. However, Chinh's former deputy, HCMC-based professor Tran Khue, has disputed this and formed his own

faction, the "21st Century Party." Nhung said the reason Chinh appointed Nguyen Tam, rather than Tran Khue, was because Khue was "under a lot of pressure" and "not capable enough." Nhung said that she met last year with Nguyen Tam in Thailand, adding that VYD does not, however, receive financial support from the DPV.

OTHER PRO-DEMOCRACY GROUPS AND DISSIDENTS

¶ 7. (C) Nhunghad little knowledge of the activities of other pro-democracy groups. On Bloc 8406, she said that other members of her group were also members of Bloc 8406. She had heard of the PDP and the recent arrest of an AmCit PDP-member in connection with Olympics protests (Ref. B) and knew of AmCit leader Cong Do. She also knew that several members of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) were in prison. On Viet Tan, she knew the GVN considered Viet Tan a "terrorist" organization" but that Viet Tan had also renounced violence several years ago. She claimed not to know of Viet Tan members in Vietnam but said Viet Tan had a reputation for "having a lot of money."

¶ 8. (C) Regarding the case of recently arrested blogger Nguyen Hoang Hai (aka Dieu Cay) (Ref. A) on charges of tax evasion, Nhungh said the GVN was "looking for any reason" they could to arrest and sentence Hai, especially due to his high-profile anti-China street protests and blogs from late last year. She said it is possible that blogger Hai may have evaded paying taxes; however, this is exceedingly common practice in Vietnam, so she has no doubt he was targeted for his political activities. Hai belonged to the Free Journalists Club, which Nhungh said has only 15 members at this time.

¶ 9. (C) Nhungh said there were enormous amounts of pressure and harassment placed on journalists by GVN authorities, citing contacts at Tuoi Tre (Youth), a leading Vietnamese daily newspaper, known to be more open to dissident groups. She said that many journalists suffered from both "physical and mental health injuries," due to police activities and that she would be contacting Reporters without Borders.

MICHALAK